



UNIVERSITY OF
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IFAS EXTENSION

Friday's Feature

By

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Preparing your lawn for winter starts in September

Gulf Coast summers often seem endless. Even though it's still hot outside, now is the time to think about preparing your lawn for winter. The lawn will look better in the spring if you properly take care of it in the fall.

First, scout for late summer and early fall insect pests. It's important to find pests now because it's difficult for grasses to recover from damage once temperatures cool.

Look for white grubs, sod webworms, mole crickets and chinch bugs. For more information on how to scout and control pest insects in turf, read the UF/IFAS publication titled "Insect Pest Management on Turfgrass." It's available online at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/IG001> or by calling your local Extension office.

A late summer application of fertilizer can be beneficial, but don't fertilize too late in the year. A general guideline for the last fertilizer application is mid-September for North Florida.

Using high nitrogen fertilizers on lawns past September can actually encourage diseases like brown patch and increase the chance of winter kill. Late season applications of nitrogen will promote shoot growth in the fall, when grass growth and metabolism should be slowing down. This will deplete carbohydrate reserves, which helps the grass regrow in the spring. It will also produce new, tender shoot growth that is less able to tolerate adverse environmental conditions such as cold.

However, an application of potassium may enhance cold tolerance and promote earlier spring green-up of grass.

You may want to consider a fertilizer that is relatively high in potassium and low in nitrogen and phosphorus. Read the fertilizer bag carefully before purchasing. The elements are listed in this order: nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium. If it is high in the first two, it is not recommended for late-season fertilization in the Deep South.

Now is the time that summer weeds are maturing and setting seed. It can be very difficult to kill existing weeds this late in the season. Normally, the younger the weed seedling, the easier it is to control. Continue to hand pull when feasible and mow often enough to keep the weeds from setting seed.

Winter weeds, however, have not yet germinated. So, it's time to start thinking about winter weed control. If you had a problem with weeds in January and February, start preparing to apply a preemergence herbicide.

Preemergence herbicides form the basis for a chemical weed control program in turfgrass. They are used primarily to control annual grasses such as annual bluegrass. Preemergence herbicides are applied before weed seed germination. Timing is everything when it comes to weed control.

For preemergence control of winter annual weeds, apply a herbicide when nighttime temperatures drop to 55° to 60°F for several consecutive days which is usually early October for North Florida. If the chemical is applied after weed emergence, preemergence herbicides will have little or no effect. This narrow window of application timing is a potential disadvantage for many homeowners, who often wait too late to apply the preemergence herbicide. Contact your local Extension office or visit <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/EP141> for more information on weed management.

Regardless of your type of grass, appropriate mowing, fertilizing and watering in the fall can help minimize cold temperature damage.

Theresa Friday is the Residential Horticulture Extension Agent for Santa Rosa County. The use of trade names, if used in this article, is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. It is not a guarantee, warranty, or endorsement of the product name(s) and does not signify that they are approved to the exclusion of others. For additional information about all of the county extension services and other articles of interest go to: <http://www.santarosa.fl.gov/extension>